

VZCZCXYZ0049
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHWN #0875/01 1391848
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 191848Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2533
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN 0096
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J5 MIAMI FL
RUEHCV/USDAO CARACAS VE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0239

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRIDGETOWN 000875

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/19/2016
TAGS: [AORC](#) [CPAS](#) [OFDP](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [DO](#) [SZ](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: DOMINICA'S DIPLOMATIC TROUBLE WITH SWITZERLAND

REF: A. BRIDGETOWN 429
[1](#)B. BRIDGETOWN 239

Classified By: Poloff Michael Kelleher for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Dominica brought Switzerland to the International Court of Justice over the Swiss decision to strip a Dominica "diplomat" of his diplomatic status. Russian-born Roman Lakschin, who obtained Dominica citizenship through the Caribbean island-state's economic citizenship program, was accredited as Dominica's representative to the UN in Switzerland. The Government of Switzerland withdrew Lakschin's diplomatic status because it believes he is a businessman and not a bona fide diplomat. Dominica argued in response that the Swiss have no right to withdraw Lakschin's diplomatic accreditation, which is to the UN and not Switzerland. Lakschin's ties to Dominica have previously been the subject of a controversy that calls into question the integrity of both the country's economic citizenship program and its diplomats. End summary.

Dominica Brings Case Against Switzerland

[1](#)2. (U) The Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica (GCOD) brought a case against Switzerland before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over what Dominica says is Switzerland's unlawful decision to withdraw the diplomatic status of Roman Lakschin, Dominica's representative to the UN in Geneva. In presenting its case to the ICJ in April, the GCOD accused the Swiss of violating the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations by removing the diplomatic credentials of Lakschin, who was not a representative to Switzerland but to the UN. Dominica argued that as a small country of only 70,000 people it is constrained in its ability to select diplomatic representatives and has the right to send whomever it wishes to Geneva to act as its envoy to the various UN agencies located there. Curiously, in May the GCOD announced that it would delay its legal action against Switzerland until the matter could be investigated further.

Diplomat's Questionable Status

[1](#)3. (U) Roman Lakschin's diplomatic activities on behalf of Dominica have previously been the subject of controversy. The Russian-born Lakschin received Dominica citizenship in the 1990s through the country's economic citizenship program. In March 1996, he was accredited to the UN, its specialized

agencies, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), as Counselor to the Permanent Mission of Dominica to the UN in Geneva. In December 1996, the Swiss withdrew Lakschin's accreditation, stating that it had done so because he was a businessman and not a diplomat. Dominica responded by re-appointing Lakschin as Charge d'affaires in March 1997, then elevated him to Ambassador in May. The Swiss again withdrew Lakschin's accreditation in November 1998. Dominica does not appear to have taken any further action on Lakschin's behalf until it filed the current case with the ICJ in April 2006.

Living in Monaco and Selling Passports

¶4. (U) Despite Roman Lakschin's various diplomatic assignments to Dominica's Mission to the UN in Geneva, Dominica does not appear to have any type of diplomatic presence in Switzerland and is represented throughout Europe by its Mission in Brussels. Lakschin is a resident of Monaco but has business and financial dealings in Switzerland, according to press reports.

¶5. (U) Lakschin's diplomatic activities on behalf of Dominica are alleged to have consisted solely of selling Dominica passports. These allegations first arose publicly in 2003, when the integrity of Dominica's economic citizenship program was being questioned by the international community. Canada had recently deported several Dominica economic citizens, members of the Russian-born Ponomarenko family, for suspected criminal ties. As part of its investigation into how the Russians had obtained Dominica citizenship, Dominica Attorney General Henry Dyer said the GCOD would look into any connection to Roman Lakschin, who was suspected of having sold several Dominica passports to Russians for US\$500,000 each. The Dominica press also reported in 2003 that the GCOD had assisted Swiss authorities in investigating Lakschin for selling Dominica passports to two Swiss families.

¶6. (U) Note: It is unclear exactly how many passports have been issued under Dominica's economic citizenship program, which was begun in 1991 as a means to attract investment to this small, economically troubled country. A 2003 report by the BBC cited 2,371 passports, while a GCOD official put the number closer to 3,000 in 2005. At present, economic citizenship requires a payment to the GCOD of US\$75,000 for an individual or US\$100,000 for a family of four. The information publicly available on the program does not indicate if issuance of a Dominica diplomatic passport requires an additional fee. End note.

Who Filed the Case for Dominica?

¶7. (U) Questions have been raised in the Dominica press about the decision to bring a case against Switzerland eight years after Roman Lakschin was last stripped of his diplomatic status and after the GCOD had itself accused Lakschin of impropriety. According to one account, Lakschin was recently sued in Switzerland and invoked diplomatic immunity, claiming still to be Dominica's Ambassador. He then traveled to Dominica and convinced certain government officials, possibly even Foreign Minister Charles Savarin, to agree to file a case on his behalf against Switzerland for removing his diplomatic accreditation. Lakschin may have also retained the British attorney who actually wrote and filed the complaint with the ICJ in April. Observers believe that the GCOD's subsequent announcement in May that it would delay further action until the case could be investigated is an indication that certain members of the Government were not aware of the case and have questioned the decision to support Lakschin.

Comment

18. (C) Roman Lakschin's troubles once again raise questions that have surrounded Dominica's economic citizenship program and the manner in which it grants diplomatic status to non-citizens. The GCOD has taken criticism in the past for failing to adequately screen those to whom it grants economic citizenship, which is often sought by individuals attempting to avoid financial obligations or even criminal charges in other countries. The critics have also accused the prime ministers of Dominica and other Eastern Caribbean states of accepting bribes in exchange for giving diplomatic status to both economic citizens and non-citizens (reftels). In the case of Dominica, the GCOD recently requested that the USG issue a diplomatic visa to a non-citizen who had been appointed Ambassador-at-Large. The individual, a Barbados businessman who is believed to have contributed generously to Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit's 2005 re-election campaign, may very well conduct legitimate diplomatic activity on behalf of Dominica. The more that is learned about Dominica "diplomats" such as Roman Lakschin, however, the harder it may be for Dominica to convince other countries that its emissaries are genuine.

PETERS